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**Getting Out and Staying Out of Trouble: A Conceptual Framework for the
Successful Reintegration of Aboriginal Male Young Offenders**

by

Patti LaBoucane-Benson



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science

In

Family Ecology and Practice

Department of Human Ecology

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Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled *Getting Out and Staying Out of Trouble: A Conceptual Framework for the Successful Reintegration of Aboriginal Male Offenders* in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Science in Family Ecology and Practice.**

Abstract

The purpose of this investigation was to better understand the process of the successful reintegration of Aboriginal Young Offenders. The research objectives were to uncover key categories in the process of staying out of trouble, which would form a conceptual framework that accurately describes the process. In addition recommendations for policy and programs for this population of offenders would be made in the discussion. The investigator employed a grounded theory approach, which included the interviewing, data recording, transcription and analysis of six respondents, in accordance with the constant comparative method. The findings indicate that the conceptual framework is similar to other models of behaviourism, which include an action-consequence sequence. The investigation uncovered those consequences that were meaningful to this specific population of people and discussed how service providers can best create environments that will effect behaviour change.

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The researcher would like to, first and foremost acknowledge the research respondents for the time they committed to this project, their honesty and ability to be “real” with the researcher during the interview process. It is not an easy task to discuss the issues and events that are involved in getting out and staying out of trouble.

“Thank you so much for your help and may your efforts result in helping other Aboriginal Youth”.

The respondents are listed below (at their consent) in no particular order:

Shane Redstar

Jason Daniels

Kevin Wanderingspirit

Lance Harris

Stephan Lea

Marvin Whitford

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Introduction

1. Statement of Purpose

1.1. Research Question

The research question was developed using two sources of information; background experience, which Glaser (1978) indicates is helpful in sensitising the researcher to the phenomenon, as well as a review of the literature.

First, the author's personal experience in working with Aboriginal children, adolescent and Young Offenders helped to determine the broad area of investigation. While supervising a Young Offender Open Custody Facility for Native Counselling Services of Alberta, the author had the opportunity to observe over 100 primarily Aboriginal Male Young Offenders, 15 to 19 years of age. Observations included many boys who successfully completed their sentence, others who ran away from the facility, and yet others who completed their sentences only to re-offend within two years of release. Although all of these boys had a custody disposition at the same facility, with very similar opportunities, they realised a variety of results of their incarceration. It was from this context that the author chose this population for study, and framed the research question.

Second, a review of the literature on Aboriginal Young Offenders was completed. While some research exists on Young Offenders in general, it was found that there has been very little research on Aboriginal Young Offenders

specifically and the literature that exists is primarily either statistical information or program descriptions. There is no indication regarding the success of the programs, neither formal evaluations nor long-term follow-up of participants, to indicate whether there has been a positive effect on the reintegration of these individuals. The lack of evaluative and research-oriented literature on Aboriginal Young Offenders confirmed that this specific research project was needed and timely.

The guiding research question that identifies the phenomenon to be studied, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) therefore, is: “How do Aboriginal Repeat Young Offenders achieve and maintain successful integration?”

1.2. Purpose and Objectives of Investigation

The purpose of this research project was to better understand the process of success of Aboriginal Young Offenders. The investigation focused specifically on those who have been repeatedly involved with the Young Offender system but had not been incarcerated in the adult system. The investigation was exploratory, studying a phenomenon that is not well understood, and identifying / discovering important variables and concepts regarding Aboriginal Young Offender success (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). These variables formed a conceptual framework regarding the process of successful reintegration of Aboriginal Young Offenders.

The objectives of the research project were threefold. The first objective was to identify key concepts in the development and maintenance of successful behaviours and lifestyles for Aboriginal Young Offenders. The second objective was to develop a conceptual framework that describes the process, from data systematically obtained from social research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which can be generalized to increase our understanding of what can effectively stimulate success in other Aboriginal Young Offenders.¹ The final objective was to make recommendations for policy and programming for Aboriginal Young Offenders, based on the findings that can effect a positive change in the type of programming available to this population.

Native Counselling Services of Alberta (NCSA) sponsored this project, which was made possible through a grant agreement with the Alberta Law Foundation. This report will be published both as a thesis for the University of Alberta, as well as an NCSA publication in hard copy as well as on-line, at www.ncsa.ca.

¹ Although academically it is appropriate to describe this process as “developing a theory”, from an Aboriginal perspective it is true that all theories (concepts that explain certain facts or phenomena) have been developed, verified and validated in the traditional teachings over time. With this in mind, the researcher understands that the process of success for Aboriginal Young Offenders already exists. The goal of the research, therefore, is to illuminate the theory, describe it for those who do not have access to the traditional wisdom and then translate the information into a useable model. This is a process of bridging academic and traditional Aboriginal thought.

1.3. Definitions

For the purposes of this investigation, success for Aboriginal Male Young Offenders was defined as remaining out of jail (either Young Offender or Adult) for a period of two years or more.

2. Justification for Research Project

2.1. The Canadian Reality: Aboriginal and Young Offender Demographics

In the process of understanding the Canadian reality regarding Aboriginal Young Offenders, it is important to examine two areas; contemporary issues for Aboriginal youth and current policy for Young Offenders.

There were 110 883 Young Offender cases processed in the courts of Canada in the 1997-1998 year, which represents 2% of the total youth population (Hendrick, 1999). In 1996, the total Canadian population was 28,528,125 people; Aboriginal people accounted for 799 010 of the population (Statistics Canada, no date). Although Aboriginal people represent only 2.8% of the population, Aboriginal youth were disproportionately represented in Young Offender convictions (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

Repeat offenders, Young Offenders who have been convicted more than once, account for 43% of the total Young Offender cases. Although no information could be found that indicates how many repeat offenders are of

Aboriginal origin, in keeping with the national trend in total crimes, one could assume that a disproportionate number of repeat offenders may be Aboriginal. Repeat offenders were three times more likely in the 1997-1998 year to be given custody terms than first time offenders, and much more likely to have committed a violent crime (Hendrick, 1999).

2.2. Contemporary Issues of Aboriginal Youth

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (RCAP) inquiry began in 1990, included the interviewing of thousands of Aboriginal and Inuit people across Canada. It required approximately five years to complete. The purpose of the inquiry was to examine all issues that were relevant to Aboriginal people across Canada and propose solutions to those problems. In the sections dedicated to Aboriginal Youth, the RCAP report (1995), states “the current generation [of Aboriginal people] are paying the price for cultural genocide, racism and poverty, suffering the effects of hundreds of years of colonialist public policy” (Vol. 4 Ch. 4). Assimilation and acculturation have affected Aboriginal youth, who are:

...caught between the expectations, values and demands of two worlds [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal], and are unable to find a point of balance. Their despair is manifested in early school leaving, substance abuse, suicide attempts, defiance of the law and teen pregnancies (RCAP, 1995; Vol. 3 Ch. 4).

The Statistics Canada publication, A Profile of Youth Justice in Canada, (Stevenson, Tufts, Hendrick & Kowalski, 1997) affirmed the findings of the RCAP report, stating that

Aboriginal youths are considered an “at-risk” population because they are younger overall, they experience high rates of unemployment and low income, they have lower levels of education, and they are more likely to live in lone-parent families than the non-Aboriginal population (p. 60).

These conditions, coupled with the prediction that the Aboriginal population will increase dramatically in the next ten years, results in the potential of a large population of Aboriginal youth being at risk to be involved in the criminal justice system as both victims and offenders (Stevenson, et al, 1997).

In speaking with hundreds of Aboriginal youth, the RCAP found that the clear priorities articulated were healing, employment, education, culture and identity. The foundation of all recommendations made for the youth policy is the empowerment of Aboriginal youth, which includes the fostering of healthy self esteem, cultural awareness and leadership skills (RCAP, 1995). The report also recommends the development of a framework for a Canada-wide Aboriginal youth policy; one that includes the development of programs in the justice system that assist Aboriginal youth to reintegrate into the community in culturally appropriate ways.

2.3. National Youth Justice Renewal Strategy

In an effort to address the weaknesses of the Young Offender Act, the Canadian Government released the Renewal for Youth Justice (RYJ) strategy in 1999. The strategy has three distinct objectives: to promote crime prevention and to have meaningful alternatives to the formal Youth Justice system; to provide meaningful consequences for youth crime; and to emphasize rehabilitation and reintegration (Department of Justice Canada, 1999).

Special consideration for Aboriginal Youth was made in the report, stating that Aboriginal youth are over-represented in the justice system, highlighting the need for responses that address root causes of crime, as well as a way of holding youth accountable for their actions in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways (Department of Justice Canada, 1999). The Government of Canada, in response to the RCAP recommendations regarding Aboriginal youth, made this commitment. In more general terms, the report also states that research demonstrates that appropriate treatment, guidance and support for Young Offenders is necessary both in custody and after release into the community, for successful reintegration.

2.4. Demonstrated Need for Research

In keeping with the new National strategy for Youth Justice, the Federal Government has identified a need for the development of policies and programs

that successfully hold Aboriginal youth accountable for crimes committed.

Success is defined minimally as staying out of prison, and at best as the adoption of a crime-free lifestyle.

However, to date, specific information has yet to be generated around “what works” for the reintegration of Aboriginal young offenders. While individual programs nation-wide have demonstrated some success in working with Aboriginal Young Offenders both in custody and in the community, we do not know why some youth successfully reintegrate after incarceration, while others go on to commit more crime. Therefore, it is evident that the process of success for Aboriginal Young Offenders is not well understood.

Research was required, therefore, to illuminate the process of success, beginning when the Young Offender is apprehended, continuing through incarceration, and ending with at least two years of successful community living. What happened to the individual that changed his behaviour? Who had the most impact? What programs did he participate in? What effect (if any) did his family have? Currently, there exists anecdotal information around success stories; without scientific investigation, however, the process remains unclear and the community’s ability (local, provincial and national) to effect change in policy to assist in the process of success is significantly diminished.

Method

3. The Grounded Theory Approach

The process that is most suitable for such a research question is the grounded theory approach. This approach assists the researcher in developing or generating theory that is grounded in data, which explains the phenomenon being studied and is specific to the context of that phenomenon (Babchuk, 1996; Cresswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The grounded theory approach differs from other methods of inquiry in that, rather than testing the relationship among variables, the researcher strives to discover the relevant categories (or variables) and understand the relationships among them (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The categories emerge through rigorous analysis of data, ensuring that the theory created is grounded in the data collected.

The grounded theory approach has also been described as "a methodological approach (entailing a cyclic process of induction, deduction and verification) and a set of strategies for data analysis to improve the reliability and theoretical depth of analysis" (Green, 1998). This type of analysis, also known as the constant comparative process, allows for "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

3.1. History and Philosophy of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was developed as a research methodology derived from the assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of symbolic interactionism (Kendall, 1999), which explores the meaning that individuals give to events and social interactions, and how behaviour is subsequently affected by these interactions (Kools, 1997). Symbolic Interactionism is “both a theory about human behaviour and an approach to inquiring about human conduct and group behaviour” (Annells, 1996).

Originally, the pioneers of grounded theory assumed that there is a reality specific to the population of people being studied; that the theory discovered must be relevant; that this relevance [or reality] is in the data (Glaser, 1978); and it is the researcher’s task to uncover that reality. They held the ontological standpoint that was a form of critical realism, (which is prominent in symbolic interactionism) in that “the social and natural worlds have differing realities, but that both forms of reality are probabilistically apprehensible, albeit imperfectly” (Annells, 1996).

Epistemologically, the earlier descriptions of grounded theory also indicated that there was a significant distance between the researcher and the participants in research. Annells (1996) described this distance as a “definite post-positivistic suggestion that the method is independent of the researcher and has separate existence”. This had methodological ramifications, in that

objectivity was sought through a process in which the researcher is perceived to be outside and separate from what is being researched.

3.2. Central Beliefs

The grounded theory approach was uncovered through an attempt to understand "how the discovery of theory from data - systematically obtained and analysed in social research - can be furthered" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.1). It is the creation of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, and is founded on the belief that useful theory can only be developed through a process of research, described as "generating a theory from data [whereby] most hypothesis and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of research." (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p.6)

Another central tenet of Glaser and Strauss's philosophy is the difference between the grounded theory approach and the less systematic development of theory. In The Discovery of Grounded Theory (1967), they state, "grounded theory will be more successful than theories logically deduced from a priori assumptions" (p.6). They argued that the grounded theory approach is the development of theory that is not easily replaced or refuted, because it is "intimately linked to data" (p. 4) and will therefore be usable for many years. In contrast, those theories that are "logically deduced based on ungrounded assumptions" (p. 4), (and not directly linked to data collected in social research),

stand to be refuted quickly and easily forgotten. The adequacy of a theory, they believe, can be judged by, in part, the process by which it is generated.

Glaser and Strauss's philosophy also addressed their perceived lack of theories that existed to explain sociological phenomenon. They argued that many of the existing theories (at that time), were ungrounded or not relevant, therefore not providing the fit needed for ongoing sociological research. They challenged the prevailing canons of academia and research, stating that any sociologist, using the appropriate method, could generate useful grounded theory - that the process was not reserved for geniuses or the upper echelon of research. Their proposed approach to research stemmed from the desire to encourage "able sociologists to generate more and better theory with the ... comparative method ...and in turn, to start developing methods of their own for [all researchers] to use" (p. 12).

Finally, Glaser and Strauss held the position that both qualitative and quantitative data collection were equally important, and both types of data can inform and form the basis of, theory development. They held the view that their proposed method of grounded theory development could be used for either type of data but that qualitative data was most useful in sociological research in general and specifically because the "crucial elements of sociological theory are often found best with a qualitative method" (p.18).

3.3. Grounded Theory and Aboriginal Peoples

3.3.1. Philosophical Issues

When considering the philosophical issues of grounded theory research, ontological, epistemological and axiological assumptions need to be considered. While the critical realist view of the nature of reality and a post-positivistic relationship between researcher and research may have been perceived as appropriate in research milieu 1967, these notions create issues regarding validity and usefulness of research when cultural considerations are made. Subsequent publications on grounded theory suggest that grounded theorists adapt a more “relativistic ontology” – emphasizing the importance of perspective, asserting that reality cannot be known “but is always interpreted”, (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.22; cited in Annells, 1996) and acknowledge “the analyst is also a crucially significant interactant” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p278; cited in Annells, 1996) in the research process.

When considering the grounded theory method for Aboriginal participants, notions of relativism are more useful, as they reflect the interpretative and value-laden nature of data collection and analysis. The role of the researcher's values is therefore implicated when considering the validity of the grounded theory produced. If the research findings are to be truly grounded, the researcher must acknowledge how his/her assumptions factor into the discovery and interpretation of incidents and categories throughout the analysis of the data. The researcher must not only ask the question “how does this incident compare to the

previous incident/category” but also “do I really understand what the participant meant in this statement and are my interpretations correct?”

To ensure that the researcher’s interpretation is accurate, s/he may consider other techniques, such as facilitating a focus group consisting of research participants, to check research findings during the third stage of analysis – theoretical coding. The researcher can present a detailed account of the conceptual framework that is being developed, in an effort to solicit feedback regarding his/her accuracy in interpreting the data. This process is but one way of minimising mistakes or misunderstandings that may arise from differences in perspectives and experiences between researcher and participants.

When considering the implications of research in the Aboriginal community, the issues of researcher interpretation and the role of the researcher’s values are particularly pertinent. Research done by a researcher that is either non-Aboriginal or by an Aboriginal person who has a different set of life experiences / culture than the research population, is at risk of containing inaccurate analysis and findings. Unless the researcher can implicitly identify him/herself with the population of people being sampled, the researcher must assume that the research process will be affected by his/her own experiences and interests. The interpretations made by the researcher must therefore be checked with the research population to ensure the validity of the theory that emerges. In addition, these considerations may be made when choosing the researcher for specific projects.

In summary, it has become evident that the evolution of grounded theory philosophy has created a potentially more culturally appropriate research approach for Aboriginal people. Indeed, the issue of interpretation and the role of the researcher's values are critical when considering the validity and reliability of research findings for any specific population of people.

In a review of the literature, specific articles were located that addressed the philosophical differences between grounded theory practice and the Aboriginal community. Jurich (2000) wrote extensively about her experience of doing grounded theory health research with the Lakota Indians in South Dakota: the article is an extensive examination of the difficulty of doing cross-cultural research, the process of developing a shared meaning with the Lakota people and how this ultimately affected her as a human being and the manner in which she analysed her data.

Jurich spent 18 months living with a family on the reservation, participating in community life and building relationships with community members. By learning (through a slow, difficult and often embarrassing process) "Lakota ways", she developed an understanding of some important aspects of Lakota life, and got closer to developing a shared meaning of these aspects, which invariably assisted in a more rich and accurate final research product. Jurich states:

My work illuminates more about the process of interpretation than about Lakota ontology. I cannot explicate the central features of Lakota ontology. I was thrown into that culture, but I am not of

that culture. My account of Lakota life was a distanced near accounting.... It was from the position of experiencing self, a primarily ontological posture in the field, that understanding of the other was informed. This understanding is not obtained through the Cartesian framework of subject observing subject.... The practices of the Lakota were the starting point for hermeneutic interpretation. My learning and engagement in certain practices illuminated aspects of a Lakota ontology in which cultural meanings are embedded. (p. 160)

For Jurich, the issues of interpretation of data and how those interpretations affect the appropriateness of analysis were central to philosophical issues that arose in the process of analysis. She experienced feelings of protectiveness of the data she collected, because the analysis process of creating categories, or construction of theory, seemed to lack the realness of the experience she had with the informants. Category names, for example, seemed to objectify, distort and trivialize the data (p. 153), and in that process of objectification, lost their importance or “Lakota-ness”. Jurich found that she needed to rely on her experiences of developing a shared meaning with the Lakota, to guide her through the process of analysis, to ensure that the Lakota way of being was preserved in the process of answering the question “What does it take to provide good health care [to the Lakota]” (p. 154).

Issues with categorization and the process of constructing theory are further examined in Graveline's (2000), poetic narrative that seeks to "engage qualitative researchers from all disciplines in an ongoing dialogue to recognize and resist the oppressive euro-centric attitudes and practices currently shaping research norms" (p.1). She comments that by creating categories we "confine data to identified themes" (p.8) and that categories exclude important information such as the relationships between informants that are not directly related to the research topic. She concludes by recommending that all data collected by Talking Circle as Methodology is best left "Un-edited Un-analyzed" (p.10), in order to preserve the interconnectedness that exists.

Obviously every researcher, when embarking on a grounded theory project in a community, needs to be cognizant of the philosophical issues related to the process of knowledge generation. However appropriate the overarching philosophy of an approach is, what matters most in research is the individual notions of the researcher or research team. Most research methods (including grounded theory) can be utilized to create useful and meaningful findings only if the individuals doing the research adopt ethical research principles and are mindful of the importance of examining cultural differences that can affect data collection and analysis.

In an effort to inform the reader of the final research document, care should be taken to situate the researcher or research team and the chosen method in relation to the population of Aboriginal informants. A good example of

explaining “situation” is in Buehler (1992), who participated in a grounded theory project on the Crow Reservation. Buehler explains where the reservation is, the composition of the research team (whether Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal), and the ethnicity of the participants. The report states up-front any time informants were reluctant to share information and the assumption the researchers made as to why they felt the information would be withheld. Although some readers may not agree completely with the decisions made by the research team (i.e. to include non-Aboriginal participants in a study regarding Traditional Crow Indian health beliefs), or the assumptions that may have been made, this information is clearly stated, helping to position the parameters of the study for the reader.

In addition, it is acknowledged that personal experience is usually what attracts any researcher to a specific topic or area of research. An individual who has worked in the child welfare system, for example, may be very attracted to research regarding the apprehension of children from families. These personal experiences can influence the development of preconceptions of the researcher and assumptions that are made throughout the research process. It is necessary that these assumptions be articulated clearly in order for the reader and those who may use the research to shape policy or opinions, to better understand what the interests of the researchers were when completing the project.

3.3.2. Theoretical Framework

Taking into consideration this evolution of the philosophy of grounded theory, the grounded theory approach has the potential to ensure that the established assumptions of the scientific community - biases that are often steeped in values, beliefs of the dominant western society - will not hinder the creation of a theory that is specific, appropriate and useful for Aboriginal people.

Certain assumptions are made at the onset of the research process when using the grounded theory approach to create theory that explains a specific phenomenon: the basic process of the phenomenon have not been yet identified and the relationship between the concepts that we [may] already know are poorly understood and undeveloped (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The purpose of this approach is to discover new concepts and form a new theory; therefore, the application of previously developed concepts regarding the subject matter is not advised. To do so may limit the investigation, in that they may or may not apply to this specific population and can limit the evolution of concepts that result in the research process. The implication for Aboriginal people is that the grounded theory method provides the possibility of producing findings that are Aboriginal specific, relevant and useful to community people.

In order to produce results that are Aboriginal appropriate, however, care needs to be taken when considering the relationship between the researcher and respondents. In a study involving cross-cultural nutritional research, DeVault (1995), illustrates how the grounded theory process may inhibit awareness of the

racial-ethnic dynamics between the interviewer and the interviewee on the data. Regarding the need to identify the effect of these interactions on the quality of information produced, DeVault states “close analysis suggests talk will sometimes reveal racial-ethnic dynamics even when these are not explicit topics and that active attention to such structured inequalities produces a more robust analysis” (p. 1). She further states that interviewers who are following the grounded theory guidelines and letting the findings emerge from their data, may miss the “significance of race-ethnicity in the accounts of informants”. In this instance, DeVault demonstrates how using the grounded theory process will produce less valid findings, especially when there are cross-cultural barriers between the researcher and the informants.

In the final steps of data analysis the researcher may find concepts emerging that are similar to those found in other research. During the discussion of findings technical information from different sources can be discussed and other theories expanded with new information. In the case of Aboriginal research, the process allows the researcher to carefully select these other findings that are appropriate for the population of Aboriginal respondents. Doing this can either demonstrate validity of previous findings for the respondents (through triangulation) or the lack of validity of earlier research.

In this way the grounded theory approach does not necessarily adopt a reductionistic perspective of Aboriginal people, which assumes that all Aboriginal people have the same experiences and needs. A more realistic and useful

position is to acknowledge that there are as many interpretations and “ways of being/knowing” of Aboriginal culture in Canada as there are numbers of communities of Aboriginal people. Each Elder, recognized community leader, Cultural Advisor or Spiritual Leader will interpret the culture in a unique, yet equally valuable manner, based upon the instruction (traditional and contemporary) that person has received. While some researchers may over-generalize research findings, assuming that what works for one specific group of individuals will work for all groups, the approach employed by grounded theory gives the researcher the ability to be population or community specific, and where relevant, to retain the voice of the individual.

What makes the grounded theory approach most attractive for the Aboriginal community, then, is the notion that the researcher should go into the process with as few pre-formed ideas or theories as possible; however, this still implies that personal biases or assumptions do exist and they need to be formally acknowledged. “In addition, researchers should not forget that they share a professional culture that may create further distance between researcher and respondent” (Barnes, 1996). In effect, even if the researcher is an Aboriginal person, sharing some characteristics with the population being researched, he/she is also a part of the academic culture, which can create conflicting assumptions.

3.3.3. Indigenous People and Writing Theory

Finally, the process of knowledge generation is a political one, in that the information produced can have sweeping effects on the population where participants were selected. For Aboriginal people, the implication is that when Aboriginal people are not involved throughout the research process, often the findings can be racist at least, or harmful at worst. In the publication Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, (1999), Smith states that:

...Writing, and especially writing theory are very intimidating ideas for many indigenous students. Having been immersed in the Western academy, which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all of the rules by which the Indigenous world has been theorized, Indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silent. (p. 29)

The prospect of creating theories that are specific to Aboriginal people is both long overdue and necessary. The grounded theory method, which was developed specifically to make the process of theory writing available to "the average" researcher, opens new opportunities for Aboriginal people to assert themselves in the generation of knowledge that affects themselves, their families and their communities.

"Appendix E: Ethical Guidelines for Research of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples" (1996), states many principles for conducting research with

Aboriginal peoples. These include statements regarding Aboriginal people's experience of research being initiated outside of the Aboriginal community, conducted by non-Aboriginal people, and containing "ethnocentric and racist interpretations" (Vol.5: P. 325).

While there is no guarantee that grounded theory (or any research method) will ensure that misinterpretations in analysis will not occur (even when an Aboriginal researcher is involved), the very fact that Aboriginal people can be involved in the research and theory writing process, represents steps towards the prevention of unethical, damaging research processes. The most just approach to research, in any instance, is to involve stakeholders who are affected by the research process in the design and implementation of the research, in a more participatory and interactive manner. For example, this can mean having an advisory committee to the project that includes Aboriginal people; having a focus group to check the findings or conceptual framework to ensure accuracy; involving participants in different stages of the research (i.e. the development of survey instruments or in writing the final report); and planning appropriate dissemination of results.

Whatever the method of inclusion that is utilized, it is important for the researcher to acknowledge the significance of having meaningful participation of the population of Aboriginal people in the research process. It is significant to note that while the grounded theory approach can include any or all of the aforementioned techniques to enhance the validity of the findings, the method

does not take into consideration the overarching Aboriginal culture as the “single most important variable to be analyzed” (Barnes, 1996, p. 430); to do so would be contrary to the basic tenants of this approach. Rather, a select group of individual perspectives of culture are taken into account and interpreted. This will result in findings that are specific to that group of respondents (i.e. Aboriginal male Young Offenders), but not all Aboriginal people.

In conclusion, the grounded theory method has the potential to produce excellent, culturally relevant findings. The degree to which the results are meaningful depends upon the way in which the method is utilized.

3.4. Methodological / Theoretical Orientation of Research Project

In this investigation the grounded theory approach was utilized to study the subjective experience of successful reintegration of Aboriginal male Young Offenders. As there is an apparent absence of research from the Aboriginal Young Offender’s perspective on this process, a perspective that is important in generating knowledge about “what works” in Young Offender correctional programming, the grounded theory method was selected.

The study endorses the symbolic-interactionist orientation that individuals attach meaning to events and social interactions and that these meanings shape their subsequent behaviours (Kools, 1997). In the case of the Aboriginal Young Offenders, the study sought to understand the significant social factors that

resulted in their adoption of a crime-free lifestyle (or successful reintegration), from their perspective. In doing this, the researcher adopts a relativistic ontology, acknowledging that she is not male, and that she did not engage in criminal activity as a child and therefore did not experience the process of successful reintegration during early adulthood. Since the researcher's own life experience is so different to that of the participants in the study, she acknowledges that this investigation represents an interpretation of participant's perspectives (reality) on the reintegration process.

In light of the relativistic stance the researcher assumed in the investigation process, it is natural to assume that epistemologically, the researcher was actively involved with the research process and not separate from the process (Strauss, 1987). The researcher drew on her experiential knowledge throughout the research process: years of professional experience in working with and creating relationships with Aboriginal boys who have been in the criminal justice system added validity to inferences and interpretations of the data. The researcher has also been involved in the development and implementation of healing programs for offenders, which fostered a profound understanding of the difficult process of recovery, personal development and change. As a member of the Aboriginal community, the researcher also has personal cultural experience that may have encouraged a greater understanding of the participant's perspective, as there may be a shared cultural understanding of certain aspects of life or shared values between the researcher and the participants.

Finally, the relationship between the researcher and the participants was probably further affected by the role of “researcher” held, as this may have created dynamics that were uncomfortable for the participants. As the researcher’s primary task in the interview is to ask questions, this process may have felt unnatural and too probing for the participants. One individual stated that he had not been asked these questions since he was part of the Young Offender system and felt the interview was similar to experiences he had with some correctional staff. Another potential participant declined an interview, stating that he “didn’t ever want to have to go back there”. In these instances, every effort was made to change the dynamics; however the most interesting information came invariably when the researcher was driving the individual home after the interview, during the course of a more natural conversation. This more ordinary discussion enabled some participants to talk more comfortably about their experiences. It appeared to matter less to them that the researcher used to be involved in the Young Offender system (in fact, it seemed to enable them to use acronyms, terminology and slang more comfortably as there was a shared meaning of the “system”) than the author’s involvement in research, which may have seemed ominous.

3.5. Recruitment and Sampling Procedures

The participants in this investigation were selected according to the principles of theoretical sampling, which is based upon participants’ ability to contribute to the development of concepts which then form a grounded theory

(Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher went back and forth between interviewing and analysing throughout the recruitment process; this cumulative sampling assisted in uncovering core variables or concepts (Glaser, 1978) for the development of a grounded substantive theory.

The research process began with the recruitment of a homogeneous sample of participants. The criteria for recruitment included Aboriginal males, who had repeated experiences with the Young Offender system, had not been incarcerated as adults and were out of the system for a period of two years, living in the community. The recruitment process relied heavily on word-of-mouth, and the assistance of individuals who work in the Young Offender system and were in contact with ex-clients. Recruitment proved to be very challenging. Often those individuals who were successful in the community were difficult to find, as their last known address or phone number was not current and lead to many “dead-ends”. However, past-staff recommendations proved to be the most successful method of recruitment, as the staff knew where the individuals were and the potential participants were more willing to participate in an activity recommended by someone they trusted. The researcher then checked on the CoMIS system, the Government Young Offender Database, to confirm that the participants did in fact meet the criteria. The researcher was able to locate four individuals for this phase of the research.

The second phase of sampling focused on finding opportunities for comparison of information for theoretical elaboration (Glaser, 1978). The

process of comparison allowed the researcher to compare the concepts that had evolved to more incidents found in the data, for the purpose of expanding, defining and verifying the concepts, as well as generating new concepts. Therefore, the researcher sampled for a population of participants who are at different stages in the process in question (or had a similar but different experience) to focus on the concepts that were emerging.

The rationale for studying [this sample] is to confirm or negate the concepts under which the theory holds (Creswell, 1998). The purpose of selective sampling was to further develop the theory, which is characterized by the identification and elaboration of the properties of the population, not the description of the population itself. Comparing a different group to the homogeneous sample increases the broad range of categories and ideas that are available to the emerging theory (Glaser, 1978).

This group of participants had some successes while out in the community after serving a Young Offender sentence, but were either incarcerated as adults and are now maintaining a crime-free lifestyle, or were out in the community for an extended period of time but still heavily involved in a criminal lifestyle for a period of it. The collection of this data assisted the researcher in better understanding key concepts around staying out of trouble. Sampling continued until the categories that had been established reached the point of saturation. Saturation occurred when the Basic Social Process was set, confirmed and no new information was obtained to negate this process, even when interviewing

participants who had different experiences than the homogeneous group. The total number of participants in this investigation was six.

3.5.1. Sample Characteristics

All participants were of Aboriginal ancestry with varying connections to traditional Aboriginal cultures. All participants spent the majority of their lives in urban settings (most in the city of Edmonton). One participant was placed in foster care as a child; another was adopted as an infant into a non-Aboriginal family, (that he lives with today); the remaining spent their childhoods with their biological parent(s). The age range of the participants was 18-23 years old.

Five of the six participants spent a significant amount of time in Young Offender jail; four had experienced both closed and open custody while one had only closed custody. The sixth, although a repeat offender, had received only community dispositions and did not receive any jail time. Two participants had been charged as adults but never convicted nor incarcerated; one participant spent time in the provincial adult correctional system.

All participants had been convicted of more than one offence; through the interview process all disclosed that they had been very involved in a variety of criminal behaviours as children or adolescents.

3.6. Data Collection and Analysis

3.6.1. Interview Process

The interviews for the project were conducted at the head office of Native Counselling Services of Alberta. Interviews began with a detailed discussion of the purpose of the study, confidentiality, what would be done with the results and the fact that participant had the right to refuse participation at any time during the interview. All participants were paid \$20.00 for their participation, in an effort to demonstrate the researcher's appreciation for their help.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature; as the investigation progressed, questions were added, based upon the specific information that was required for conceptualization. Initial open-ended questions were based on the following themes (1) getting into trouble; (2) getting out of trouble; and (3) staying out of trouble. Participants were encouraged to elaborate on the nature of their relationships with key people they identified, their perspective of what helped them to make changes in their lives and what those changes were.

All interviews were digitally recorded using a lapel microphone and a computerized recording system; interviews lasted between one and two hours. The researcher then transcribed the data (deleting any identifying information of the participant or people he mentioned) and the transcriptions were prepared for data analysis. Data analysis began as soon as the first interview was transcribed, and combined systematic coding, constant comparison of data and theory building. There were four stages of analysis, detailed in the next sections.

3.6.2. Comparing Incidents Applicable to Each Category.

This stage focused on the process of open coding (Glaser, 1978; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), to “generate an emergent set of categories and their properties which fit, work and are relevant for integrating into a theory” (Glaser, 1978). Data were analyzed line by line and many different categories were identified and elaborated through the comparison of incidents. Some pertained to specific phenomena of the process of successful reintegration (such as building relationships); some were the conditions or consequences that are related to those phenomena (such as whether the relationship had a positive or negative effect on behaviour).

3.6.3. Integrating Categories and Their Properties

During the analysis of the third interview, selective coding (Glaser, 1978) began. Selective coding advanced the coding process from comparing incident to incident, to a process of comparing incidents to the properties of the categories that were formed. In doing so, the properties of the categories became integrated (related in many different ways), resulting in a unified whole. This process also assisted the researcher to begin to understand the relationship between the individual categories and to start to formulate the preliminary conceptual framework.

3.6.4. Stage Three: Delimiting the Theory

Upon completion of analysis of the fourth interview, the researcher was confident that the conceptual framework for the process of successful reintegration for Aboriginal Young Offenders was complete; the theory was delimited to one core variable, conceptual framework or Basic Social Process (BSP) that explains variability in data (Wells, 1995). In this instance, the process of “Weighing the Consequences” was deemed to be central to reintegration. The other variables in the conceptual framework proved to provide the cause, intervening condition, response or consequence of the core variable (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

From this point on in the data analysis, the researcher strove to identify the systematic relationship between the core variable and the categories around it. Theoretical coding was used to re-analyse the data to identify all of the variations of the conceptual framework and refine it. A contradictory case, one that challenges the conceptual framework was sought; the conceptual framework was adjusted to include the full range of variations in the data collected (Kearney, Murphy, Irwin & Rosenbaum, 1995). Validity and rigor were demonstrated through the search for this deviant case (such as offenders who were convicted as an adult); the data from this interview was compared to the existing concepts and assisted in refining the theory. The total number of interviews was six.

In addition the researcher turned to the existing literature about behaviour and consequences, and the role of expectations in behaviour of adolescents for

additional theoretical insight and comparative material (Green, 1998) and to identify any other research that supported the emerging theory.

3.6.5. Stage Four: Writing the Theory

The final research report was written and the information that was recorded throughout the process was used to illuminate each category.

It should be noted that the researcher experienced a significant amount of difficulty in finding participants for the study. When an individual does well in the community after being incarcerated, quite often those professionals that knew the offender lose contact with him after the terms their professional relationship have been completed. Using the existing contact information that was available on the CoMiS system proved to be unproductive as this is a transient population of people who are very rarely at the same address or phone number for extended periods of time. The researcher does believe, however, that the six young men who were interviewed provide a representative sample, in that the conceptual framework emerged and the categories became redundant quite quickly. The author was able to interview only one individual who can be considered deviant (regarding criteria) and could have posed challenges to the process that had emerged. In actuality, quite the opposite occurred; his interview proved to highlight the same categories as well as further illuminate the difficulties and strategies for managing the process of adopting a new lifestyle as a young adult.

The researcher also attempted to adopt the principles of participatory research throughout the investigation; plans were made to hold a focus group of respondents to verify the conceptual framework that emerged. It became obvious, through the difficult process of recruitment that finding a group of respondents (either having a second interview with the existing respondents or recruiting new participants) for this purpose would be very challenging and most likely not occur. The researcher therefore addressed her concerns with validity by employing strategies during the interview process that would allow for checking back on the information that was collected. The same question would be posed to the individual in several different manners at different times during the interview, then probed, in order to get as rich of a response (and therefore interpretation) as possible. In addition, interpretations gathered in one interview would be checked in the subsequent interviews, in order to develop the most accurate interpretations possible.

Findings

4. OBJECTIVE ONE: Identification of Key Categories

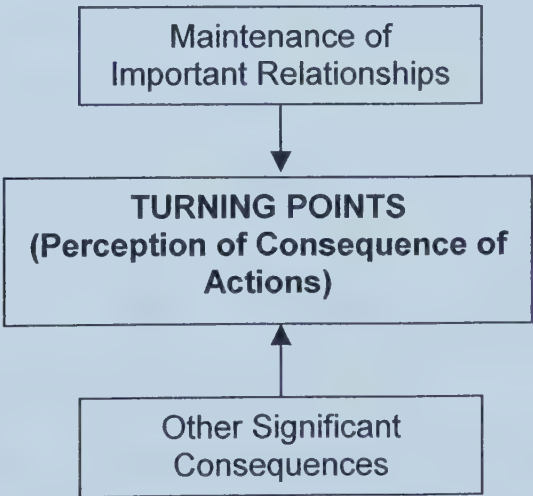
In the findings section, Objectives one and two of the research project will be addressed. The first objective is to identify and explain the key concepts that arose as a result of data analysis. This will include the clarification of the larger categories; identification and explanation of subcategories that have arisen in

each category; and the presentation of data from the respondents used to illustrate each subcategory.

4.1 CATEGORY: Turning Points - Perception of Consequences of Behaviour

How the individual judges the consequences of his behaviour, is based upon his perception of what is important in his life at that time. In this category, many different themes arose illustrating how these perceptions or judgements are formed. For Aboriginal Youth caught in the cycle of crime, perceived negative consequences caused turning points or pivotal moments that forced the individual to reflect upon how his actions were affecting his life. Figure (A) illustrates the different themes impacting upon perception.

Figure (A)



4.1.1. SUB-CATEGORY: Maintenance of Important Relationships

Clearly, all the respondents spoke about the importance different relationships played throughout their lives and how the desire to maintain those relationships motivated different behaviours. While some people influenced the individual to get into trouble at an early age, others were instrumental in the process of getting out of trouble and maintaining a more pro-social life-style.

Relationships That Influenced or Reinforced Negative Behaviour

All respondents spoke at length about their relationships with other children their age (or, in some cases, significantly older) being the most important, most influential relationship in their lives from the age of ten and onward. After the first interview, all subsequent participants were asked at what age their “bad” behaviour began (“bad” being defined by the respondent himself, referring to behaviours that he knew were inappropriate or had the potential to get him into trouble). Invariably, by the age of ten, the respondents indicated that they were participating in activities with their peers that were considered either bad or criminal. Most responded that by the age of ten, their behaviour and attitude had begun to go downhill, hitting “rock bottom” (what they considered to be their worst behaviour) around the age of 15.

During that time period, the respondents would refer to acting out negatively and doing crime with their friends or older adolescents that they admired. Respondent number two spoke about his friends as a powerful childhood influence to do crime and use drugs and alcohol, which resulted in the

development of a serious addiction. Respondent number three reported that in the absence of his father's influence (when he ran away), he was vulnerable to negative peer influence stating, "I didn't know about bad friends". He also drew a parallel between negative peers and substance abuse to the onset of crime and views peer pressure as powerful in his life, asserting, "I am a sucker for influence".

An unstable family life and a lack of parental guidance were paramount in respondent four's situation; this resulted in him turning to his peer group to provide a sense of family and role models, and instigating behaviours such as fighting, stealing and substance abuse. Criminal activity and negative behaviours became strategies for having fun with friends. Respondent number six expanded on this notion, relaying that he chose his friends over his mother's influence because he didn't want to have to listen to her and abide by her rules. Friends became a means to realizing a sense of freedom and a way to get money "the easy way", instilling a value of "not wanting to work for money".

Respondent number five elaborated on the nature of the peer relationships that were so influential. Five spoke about a very unstable family situation whereby substance abuse formed a major part of family interactions and significant family role models were involved in highly dysfunctional behaviour. He developed an admiration for older cousins, boys and family members when he was very young and stated that he gave and received respect from this group of people, aspiring to be like them. Even now he expresses admiration for those who are very good at crime. Further, respondent number six stated that he saw

himself as a follower when he was a young child; when he was older however, he was a powerful negative influence on younger children. In fact, respondents two, five and six relayed stories regarding the sense of power and control they experienced as a result of being entrenched in a criminal lifestyle long enough to become the “top dog”, especially while incarcerated. Evidently peer pressure had been a very negative influence throughout their lives and eventually they were able to exert that same negative pressure on vulnerable, younger people.

When they were discussing how they got out and stayed out of trouble, all respondents spoke about the importance of changing their peer group. While none of the individuals considered their former negative peers enemies now, they were making conscious decisions to stay away from those people who are still heavily involved in criminal behaviour.

“A lot of my friends, I don’t really talk to anymore. Like the guys I got into trouble with”. (Respondent Number Two)

“The friends I know, they have settled down – none of them steals cars no more. [Friends involved in crime] - I don’t hang out with them no more. I would probably be doing pen-time, just like all of them right now.” (Respondent Number Five)

Relationships that Influenced Positive Change

Throughout their journey of adopting a positive pro-social lifestyle, the respondents identified people in their lives that influenced change in their behaviour. The relationships that had the most significant impact were those that

were jeopardized by criminal behaviour, causing the individual to make drastic changes in lifestyle in order to save the relationship.

For all respondents, girlfriends and / or children exerted a significant influence. For some, their girlfriends threatened to end the relationship (or restrict access to themselves or their children) if the behaviour they saw as unacceptable did not stop; for others, girlfriends just became more important to be with than friends. This shift caused a significant change in priorities - such as the desire to have their own place, a car, the need to take care of her financially and / or provide a stable environment for their child. In one instance, the respondent indicated that his girlfriend's parents did not like him and he had to make changes to build a relationship with them. Respondent number 6 stated that being a good parent was important to him and he regretted that by going to jail, he lost contact with his stepson and caused confusion for the child.

Evidently a significant influence in this population's successful reintegration is the formation of relationships that motivate the individual to make changes in order to maintain or save the relationships. One such illustration is respondent number one's description of his relationship with his girlfriend, seeing her as his defender and the person who keeps the bad influences away. "She has done so much for me. She has helped me out a lot."

Respondent number four saw his relationship with his mother and probation officer as very important and sought their approval and respect in the reintegration process. "If I was going to get into a fight, I would get my probation officer and my mom mad and I didn't want that." Respondent number five also

acknowledges the support he was given while serving his disposition and stated that he tried to do well in when he got to open custody because he didn't want to let down his mom or the staff at the group home. "I know how hard it was to get me there."

In fact all respondents but one identified individuals who they identified as caring, supportive people in the correctional system. Respondent number three felt that the Aboriginal group home staff where he served part of his disposition was supportive and he felt listened to and heard. He recognized that they tried to make him feel better and that this eased some of the internal pain he was experiencing in jail. Respondent numbers one and four still maintain a good relationship with their probation officer who is seen as supportive and instrumental in adopting positive lifestyle. "She was the one who kept me going." Only one respondent, the individual who was incarcerated as an adult, spoke about the positive influence of the program instructors he encountered, stating that the instructor "changed me – that's when I really settled down".

The Role of Caring Support

While all respondents spoke about the importance of family relationships throughout their lives, they were also clear that these relationships did not affect their behaviour until they were already trying to make positive changes in their lives. For example, while all respondents but one (his mother was not present in his life) saw their mothers as supportive while they were children, in jail or both, none thought that their mothers' actions had any effect on their behaviour when

they were adolescents. Respondent number two acknowledged that his mother's intervention kept him out of jail for a long time but did not cause him to stop doing crime. Respondent number six saw his mom as "the most supportive person around" while he was growing up but was not willing to listen to her rules or guidance. Respondent number one stated that his relationship with his parents was fine as a child but that he still decided to get into trouble "out of stupidity". Respondent number three spoke about his peers becoming more influential than his father; "my father taught me right from wrong as a child but somewhere along the line, I stopped listening".

Some respondents did identify other positive role models in their families that were important after the decision to adopt a crime free lifestyle was made. Respondent number one views support from his sister and brother as important; they provided intervention between negative peers and himself, and kept the bad influences away. "If it wasn't for them I think I would still be doing crime". Respondent number four sees his older brother (who has made similar changes in his own life) as a positive role model. "I think I followed my older brother – he doesn't fight or nothing anymore."

Respondent six acknowledges the good relationship he had with his step-father. "My step-dad was my only male role-model". Respondent four saw his mother make drastic changes to turn her own life around. As a result of these changes, she is more available to him and his siblings, which in turn affects his behaviour. "Mom gets us to go to school more often, she tries to get us to do stuff, to help us out". He also stated that he wants to finish school because

mother just finished. One respondent saw his relationship with a higher power as influential, stating that he knew he was being heard or watched by the Creator when he participated in traditional Aboriginal ceremonies during his incarceration.

4.1.2. SUB-CATEGORY: Other Significant Consequences

In this category, respondents spoke about other consequences that had an effect on their behaviour. While Young Offender jail was not seen as a serious deterrent from criminal behaviour for most respondents, the prospect of going to adult jail was. For respondent two, one night spent in the remand centre [adult facility] was enough to convince him that he needed to stop his criminal behaviour. He stated to the interviewer, “[the experience in remand] that was the turning point, I can almost guarantee it. That’s when I said, ‘OK, that’s enough, no more.’” In fact, the loss of freedom they would experience by going back to jail was more than most respondents wanted to experience again. Respondent four stated his main reason for changing his behaviour was “I couldn’t stand another day of being in [jail] – not being able to go outside, do what I want”. Respondent two stated that “in jail there were all these restrictions and I didn’t like that”. He also has observed the criminal behaviour of others and the consequences of their actions – constant police surveillance and jail time, stating, “Crime carries too many risks”.

Respondent five, who spent most of his adolescence in young offender jail, was adamant; “I can’t exactly say that I don’t give a fuck, because I do ... I

don't want to go back to jail. I would probably kill myself. I don't think I could do the time." He also holds the opinion that if he were to go to jail again, he would be forced to be involved with gang activity, due to the associations he formerly had; this is an action he does not want to take. Respondent three stated that the jail time he has already experienced (as a young offender) was difficult for him, specifically the loss of family contact and freedom he experienced.

Further, the monetary consequences of crime were significant to respondent two. He noted that getting caught doing crime that resulted in making money would result in all the material possessions that have been acquired being taken away; for all the work, the individual has gained nothing. Money is of significant importance to all respondents; they saw it as a form of independence, especially when acquired legitimately. Respondents one, two, three, five and six saw employment as a replacement for crime and a risk-free way of making money to support themselves, and/or family.

It is important to be clear that the severe legal consequences that were significant for the respondents pertained to their perception of the difference between the consequences for children and those for adults. While the respondents stated that they didn't want to go to young offender jail, it really didn't matter one way or the other, as they found ways of establishing a comfortable lifestyle while in jail. Their perception of being in adult prison however was different, as they speculated that it would be unmanageable in many ways for them, unless they were willing to affiliate with a gang or some other form of protection. From this perspective, severe legal consequences were

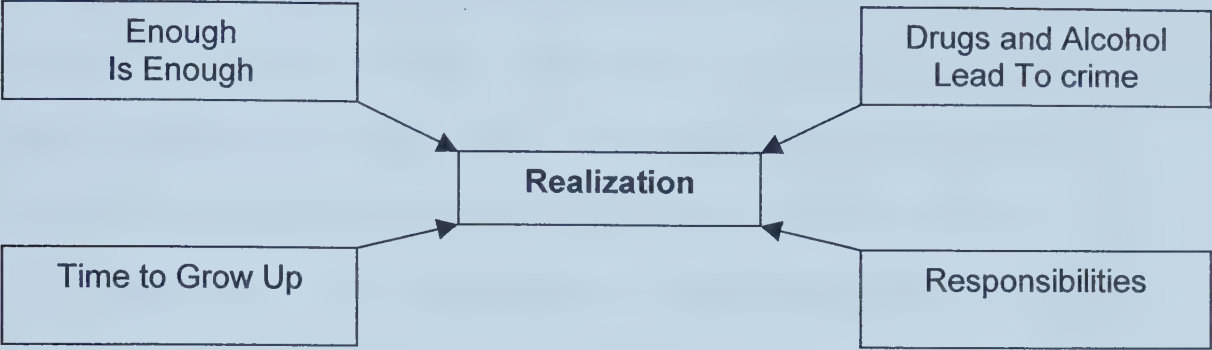
only significant once the individual was 18 years of age; for this reason, this consequence is not considered as significant for Aboriginal adolescent boys as relationships are, because it is meaningless until they became adults, or could be charged as adults.

Finally, for all respondents, crime was linked to drug or alcohol use. Respondent two quit doing hard drugs due to the permanent defects he reported from drug abuse as an adolescent. In addition, respondents two, three and five experienced out of control behaviour such as violence and rage which they found either shocking or disturbing upon sober reflection. “Like sometimes, if I get drunk it comes out – the old me. I try to keep it under control because it is trouble” (respondent two). Due to his acknowledged addiction, respondent three felt that using drugs and alcohol would definitely result in more jail time. Respondent five found himself very drunk and in a fight one night and suffered significant pain as a result. Other times, he says and does things that could result in legal trouble for him later on. He reflected, “When I am drunk I have a big mouth.”

Interestingly, the individuals who spent the most time in young offender jail did not refer to their incarceration experience as a deterrent from crime. In fact, respondents two, five and six, all of whom spent a significant time in jail, all found their stay in the Edmonton Young Offender Centre comfortable. Respondent two stated “EYOC was kind of fun”. Respondent five stated, “I had fun in EYOC; when I would go back there I wouldn’t even care – all my friends were there.” Respondent six affirmed, “EYOC wasn’t hard. It was easy.”

4.2. CATEGORY: Realization Versus Reinforcement

Figure (B)



As a result of experiencing the turning point or pivotal moment, when a consequence was bad enough to prompt the individual to look at his behaviour and how the outcome would negatively affect him, inevitably the individual would have a “realization”. In this category, the young men described the thought or notion that “hit them”; causing a significant change in behaviour. Prior to this point, realization did not occur and the consequences of his behaviour (seen as either inconsequential or liveable) would merely reinforce his criminal behaviour.

4.2.1. SUB-CATEGORY: Enough Is Enough

All respondents spoke at length about a point in time when they were at a crossroad in their lives and said, “enough is enough” to themselves. The individual taking sober reflection of his circumstance and deciding that he did not want to be in that situation ever again characterizes this sub-category. Respondent one stated that when he was doing his community service work, he thought “what am I doing in this mess when I shouldn't be here”? He was also

adamant to the interviewer that he realizes no gains from crimes anymore. “What do I get out of crime? Nothing. I didn’t find no fun out of it after. It is no fun after you get caught.” Respondent five echoed these sentiments, stating, “It is not worth it ... I just got tired of crime. I got tired of people telling me what to do. I got tired of looking over my shoulder.” Respondent number two said sitting in the remand centre one night prompted him to think, “I don’t need that shit”.

Respondent number six elaborated on how his perception of how crime affected his decision that enough is enough. As an adolescent, he associated the uneasy feeling he got in his stomach from doing crime as a part of the adrenalin rush. He realised as a young adult that this feeling is actually a result of guilt and he stated, “I realised that I didn’t want to feel like that anymore.” He also spoke about his experience in adult prison and being sick of being in jail, which made him more amenable to the advice of people around him. He perceived adult prison time as very difficult to do; this motivated him to make changes.

4.2.2. SUB-CATEGORY: Drugs and Alcohol Lead to Crime

Many respondents noted that they realised that their use of drugs and alcohol put them in high-risk situations that could potentially lead to further incarceration. Respondent two stated that he was much more physically aggressive when he was drinking and that he wouldn’t act that way unless he was drunk. Further, respondent number five spoke at length about his serious

drug abuse as a young adult. When a beloved family member died due to overdose, the effect it had on him was great. “I came close to death lots already - [My Auntie’s overdose] hit close to home.” Respondent five relayed his deep sadness over his aunt and how many times he came close to suffering the same fate.

Respondent three was clear that if he doesn’t quit using, he is going to go to jail again. He said that when he was in treatment, he learned that “alcohol and drugs doesn’t hurt only [me], it hurts the people [I] love”. He also noted that when he was not drunk, he realised a significant increase in his self-esteem and self-worth, stating “I was happy when I was straight and I was proud when I was straight ... I am sick of alcohol and drugs giving me grief”.

4.2.3. SUB-CATEGORY: Time to Grow Up

This sub-category is marked by the respondent’s need to approach life in a more mature manner. For respondent number three, this was demonstrated when he compared himself to others going through similar situations. “I am serious this time about becoming a man. Handling ... that pain. Everyone deals with pain, why can’t I?” Respondent five reflected on the fact that he was now an adult and needed to act like one. “I just wanted to grow up. I was 18 years old and I just thought I got to stay low for a long time”.

For respondent number four, his observations of how his mother made changes in her life instigated his desire to act more maturely. “I admire my mom’s

willingness to keep going.... 'cause look at what she used to be like and what I used to be like. She went through it worse than I did. So there is no reason why I can't start doing good." Respondent six began to see his relationship with family as being important. To deal with dispute he was having with his mother, he saw the need to take the initiative to make things better between them. "I just sucked it up, swallowed my pride and apologized for what I did."

For many respondents the decision to begin making better choices for themselves included making decisions for themselves – being independent and autonomous of peers. Respondent five illustrated this when he dropped his association with a well-known gang. He asserted "I just dropped my [gang] colours when all of that shit was happening and just went my own road ... I know I was making too much enemies being affiliated with these boys." Respondent three acknowledged his need to get away from negative peers when he stated, "I am a sucker for influence".

Leaving the past behind is both necessary and difficult in the process of reintegration. Respondent five referred to the difficulty of finding positive associations – and staying away from the negative ones - in a community that he has lived in for many years. He stated, "I just want to leave and start over where no one knows me." He also spoke at length about putting distance between himself and dysfunctional family members, trying to get away from negative or stressful relationships. Respondent four spoke about the difficulty of trying to change his lifestyle stating, "It's not fair when you change your life like that and other people still want to do that to you".

Another component of approaching life more maturely, is developing the ability to listen to and consider what people of authority have to say. Respondent three reached out to Aboriginal group home staff and in the process, felt listened to and heard. He began to realize that jail is a rehabilitation centre where he could better himself and that the staff cared about him; “I started to realise it wasn’t doing time - it was learning”. As an adult, respondent one realised the significance of his grandfather and what he had to offer. He referred to times when he was a child and his grandfather tried to teach him but he wouldn’t listen as a kid. He referred to this, as “I was just being stupid”.

The sub-category of “Time to Grow Up” is best summarised by the respondents making a conscious decision to change and make better decisions for themselves. Respondent two demonstrated this when he stated, “A lot of friends I have known in the past – I don’t really talk to anymore. Like, I made an effort to get this way. I didn’t just sit back and wait for it to happen. Because if you sit back and wait for it to happen, you get more trouble”. Deciding what he wants to have and what he has to do to get it, in a way that the consequences are liveable, has marked this change in his life. For respondent six, he had a pivotal moment in jail, making this promise to himself, “I was going to try my hardest to never ever go back in and get into trouble”. Since that time, he sees being straightforward and honest with authority as best method for avoiding feelings of stress and anxiety caused by being in trouble.

4.2.4. SUB-CATEGORY: Responsibility and Accountability

This sub-category is defined as the respondents' need to take responsibility for children or family and be accountable for their actions. Four of the six respondents either already had children or were awaiting the birth of one. For each one of the respondents, this has caused serious deliberations around their responsibilities to their families and/or children. Respondent three has experienced a separation from his partner and child as a result of his negative behaviour, which prompted him to want to make changes in his lifestyle. "I just thought about it and thought about my son. I have a son now and I have to look after him and [my girlfriend] too... The lesson is because I don't respect them as individuals, the Creator is not going to allow me to have them in my life." Respondent five realizes that he has responsibilities to his girlfriend and child, stating, "...after I was 18, I did my fair share of shit. Then I just started to – I met my girlfriend and stuff ...I started thinking, yeh, we'll get our own place, we'll do this, I'll be good."

For respondent six, being a father has a very big influence in his life. "It has just changed me – I'm a dad; I just take care of my kids." He also understands that by going to jail, he caused confusion in his stepson and is not willing to do that to the child again. He also drew parallels between his situation and his stepchild's saying, "My stepson's dad is like my real dad – a real deadbeat." Throughout the conversation, he was adamant that he understands the important role of a father, and the need to be supportive of his stepson and talk to him about his relationship with his biological father. Respondent four has

similar sentiments, wanting to be a good father to his soon to be born child. “I am never going to be like [my real father]. I want to be like my stepdad was, just there for me.” Even respondent two, who has no children of his own, stated that he didn’t approve of the actions of other men who had children, saying, “These guys are all walking a fine line. One is married...all three have kids...I don’t see how they can [be selling drugs].”

This sub-category also included the respondent being responsible for his actions and acting independently. For respondent one, he demonstrated this by not relying on his parents to get him out of trouble, stating, “I went to court myself and got myself out of trouble.” For respondent six he feels that by serving an extended amount of time in prison, as both a young offender and an adult, he has paid his dues to society; “I paid for all the stuff I did.” For respondent five, he indicated that he now wants to make money in a legitimate and accountable manner, as opposed to doing crime stating “Well, now I got a job so I am not going to do that shit again”. He also sees that he is completely responsible for his life, stating “I am really on my own now ... I know no one can help me quit drinking or to stop doing crime.”

4.3. CATEGORY: Behaviour Modification Versus Maintenance

All respondents indicated that the process of behaviour modification occurs slowly; it is marked by a gradual adoption of behaviours that are acceptable to the larger society. This process does not happen instantaneously, but rather involves a period of time when the individual hangs on to some

questionable behaviour in one area of his life but has taken on positive behaviours in other areas. Most participants demonstrated this by still using alcohol or drugs somewhat regularly; even though they knew that by using they could put themselves in a vulnerable situation, which could result in an arrest for illegal behaviour.

Most important to them, however, is the fact that they have stopped doing crime as a means of getting money or feeling excitement, and that they are looking at more legitimate ways of existing in society. In this way, respondents one, two and five have modified their directly criminal behaviour (ie. stealing), but have yet to have the motivation to change other negative behaviour, which results in maintenance of behaviour such as substance use.

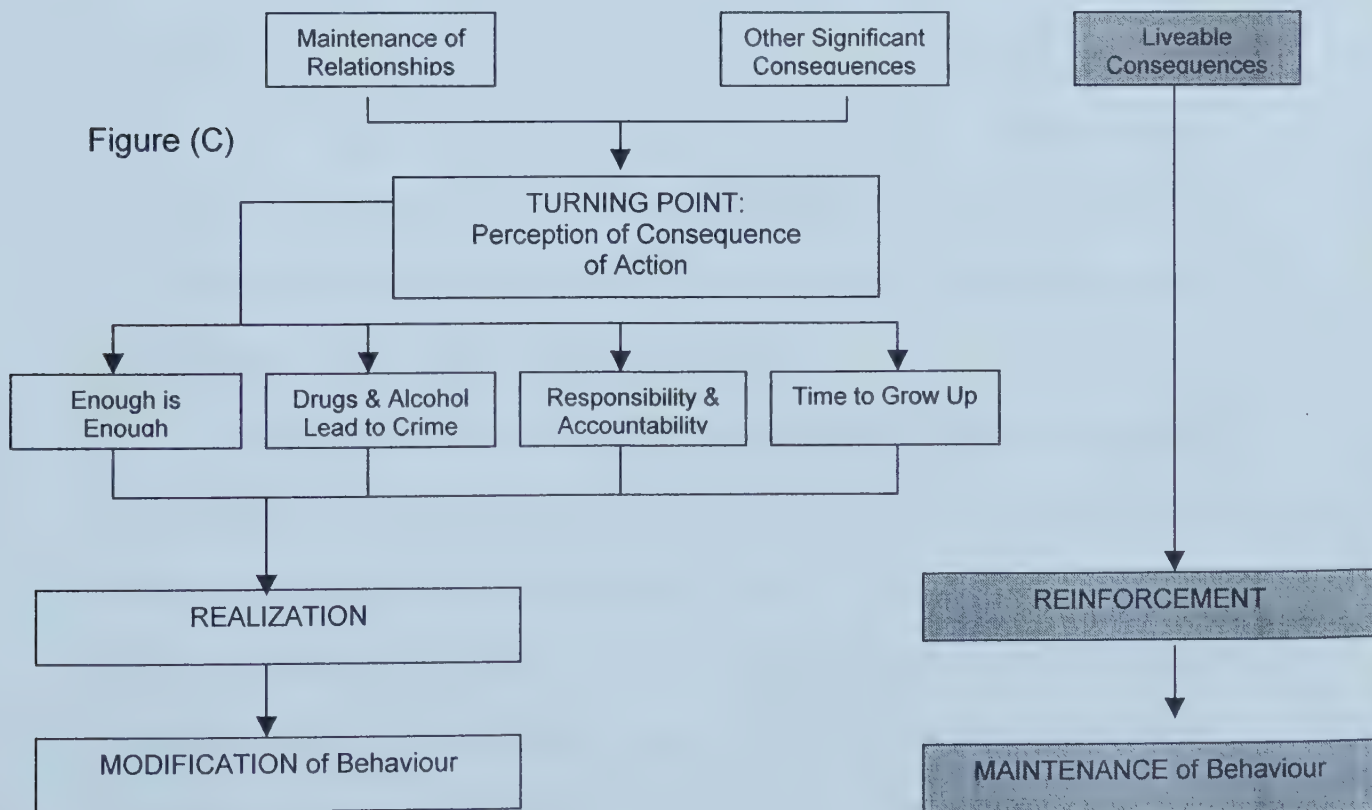
Respondents number three and six, however, have begun to think about their drug or alcohol use and the effect it has on their lives. Respondent six stated that he has stopped drinking to excess since he has been living with his girlfriend because he did not want his children to ever see him coming home in an impaired state. Respondent three acknowledges that unless he quits using drugs, he will not be reunited with his girlfriend and child.

In addition the research has noted another pattern associated with behaviour modification as a result of discussions with the respondents. All of the respondents reported having early childhoods that they described as lacking in discipline and adult guidance. This lack of structure seems to have resulted in getting into trouble at a young age and the onset of poor, uninformed decision making. Respondent six illustrated this by stating that at ages ten and eleven

there were no consequences for him when he got into trouble. “I think that may be had a little to do with why I stayed doing what I was doing.”

In the process of getting out of trouble, the respondents appear to be young adults creating structure for themselves, taking responsibility for their own actions and learning to make better choices for themselves. For respondent two, this is demonstrated by the type of work he does, which involves many long days in a row of physical labour. The fact that he does not get a great deal of time off, he stated, creates a situation where he doesn’t have time to get into trouble. He also says that he is making a significant salary and that this money is much greater than any he has had before.

5. OBJECTIVE TWO: Development of the Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework for the successful reintegration of Aboriginal Young Offenders can best be described as a process of weighing the consequences (See Figure C.) If a consequence is meaningful (perceived negative enough) it prompts the individual to experience a pivotal moment or turning point, the result is realization that something must change. The data assert that these changes involve being “fed-up” with circumstances, a change in the way he views his use of drugs and alcohol, an acceptance of responsibility or accountability for specific things in his life and / or a desire to just grow up / feel like an adult. If the consequence of his action is not perceived to be negative, or it is negative but manageable, this will reinforce behaviour and the individual will continue to behave as before.

Through this process of adopting a crime-free lifestyle, the individual is constantly analyzing consequences of behaviour in order to choose a course of action; how he judges whether a consequence is positive or negative is based upon what he considers important. What the individual deems as most important, or a priority in his life, appears to be the guiding thought or principle upon which he makes all of his decisions around behaviour.

For example, the respondents indicated that the most important aspect of their lives, after the age of ten, was how their peers viewed them. At this point in their lives, the way they were seen by their friends, was wholly more important than the opinion that their parents, teachers or other adults held of them (unless it was an adult who was connected in some way to the activities of their peers). They all admired peers and individuals who appear to have a great deal of

freedom and the ability to make decisions for themselves; they were more willing to take direction from these “autonomous peers” than from any other person in their lives. With this priority, it is not difficult to understand why they chose criminal behaviour or why going to jail (where their friends, brothers or perceived superiors may be) was seen as tolerable. Jail becomes an acceptable consequence for maintaining negative peers. In this environment, the goal then becomes to work towards being the individual that others look up to or respect, therefore exerting power over younger or more vulnerable individuals.

After making a decision to not go back to jail, or a threat of losing a now-important and positive relationship, the individual begins to seek out peers who will reinforce this modified behaviour. The sense of power that the respondents reported, in this new situation, generally came from the fact that they were now responsible for children and were committed to being “good fathers”, or the fact that they wanted to be able to have material possessions or to live independently in a legitimate way. Finding other ways of exerting personal power without being at risk of incarceration becomes the priority for the individual.

This process, however, is a gradual. None of the respondents reported giving up criminal behaviour or high-risk behaviour “over-night”. Early on in the reintegration process, the individual may choose much high-risk or criminal behaviour, while progressively beginning to adopt some that are pro-social. In this way, they gradually decrease their risky behaviour but may still exhibit some behaviour that can be judged negatively. The researcher saw this as the individuals doing the best that they can with the information they have at the

time; as they learn more about themselves and about healthy living, the risky behaviours continue to decrease. In this way, all of the respondents were at different points in the process of attaining a pro-social lifestyle.

5.1. A Comparison of the Conceptual Framework and Other Models of Human Behaviour

In behavioural research, Kunkel, (1997) asserts that a model of human behaviour that “most social psychological experiments implicitly postulate” (Section 4, para.1) is as follows:

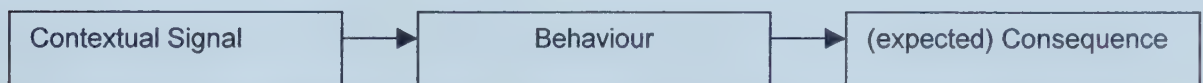


Figure (D) (Kunkel, J.H., 1997)

An individual's behaviour is based upon a combination of his past experiences and present situations; “expectations” are therefore the accumulation of a variety of past experiences. This model therefore implies that “past experiences, especially the linkages between a person's activities and their consequences are extremely significant for present and future behaviour” (Kunkel, 1997; Section 4, para.5). The behavioural model also leads to the inference that an individual's expectations are a reflection of a belief that in similar situations, similar consequences are likely to occur.

The model of human behaviour stated by Kunkel, (1997) is consistent with the proposed conceptual framework for the successful reintegration of Aboriginal Young Offenders, in that the expected consequence of their behaviour is what

motivates the individual to either modify or maintain behaviour. Respondents indicated that they knew that by modifying their behaviour, they would cause different outcomes to occur (i.e. not going back to jail); they made these assumptions based upon their past experiences or by observing the experiences of others.

Kunkel, (1997) also emphasized that there are three variables at play regarding how an individual forms expectations regarding behaviour and consequences. The first is the degree to which the individual attributes the behaviour to be linked to the consequence, placing the individual on a continuum of seeing a strong relationship between action and consequence, to no relationship between the two at all. In order for the proposed conceptual framework to be functional, the Aboriginal Young Offenders need to see a high correlation between their actions and the consequences. Further, they need to feel that they have control over the outcomes of their behaviour.

Subsequently, when respondent five stated, "I don't hang out with them no more. I would probably be doing pen-time, just like all of them right now", he was speaking to controlling his environment (being out of jail) by choosing his associations discriminately. An internal locus of control, or "one's ability to produce or avoid consequences by appropriate behaviour" (Kunkel, 1997, Section 6, para.1) is therefore key to behaviour modification. If one does not feel that he has this control, making changes to his behaviour would appear pointless and not occur.

The second variable is whether the person sees the outcome as a positive or negative consequence, placing the individual somewhere along the optimist – pessimist scale. Kunkel (1997) states that research demonstrates that optimists (those who generally expect good things to happen to them) generally “adjust more favourable to traumatic life events ... and are more successful in meeting life’s major and minor challenges” (Section 8, para.5). The pessimist – optimist orientation of the respondents in this investigation is difficult to determine; therefore a statement on whether the findings corroborate Kunkel’s statements cannot be made.

The third variable is how far into the future the individual considers the consequences of his action, placing the individual on a shorter or longer time frame scale (Kunkel, 1997). While the researcher has formed inferences on how much of the “big-picture” the respondents have considered when making their decisions to modify their behaviour, the interviews did not contain specific questions regarding time-frame data collection. However, when respondents made statements such as “I want to be a better father than my real father was”, there is a suggestion that the individual is looking far into the future of his child or step-child, making a connection between providing good parenting and the expectation of a healthier future for his children than he experienced.

The model of human behaviour and the variables that affect the model appear to be consistent with the proposed conceptual framework for the successful reintegration of Aboriginal Offenders. The framework, however, focuses not only on the process, but goes further in identifying the common

expectations or consequences that will result in behaviour modification specifically for Aboriginal Offenders.

In addition, the conceptual framework presented here can be seen as a variation (specific to a certain population of individuals) of other models of behaviour that serve as overarching, grand theories of human behaviour; one such theory is the Trans-Theoretical Model of Behavioural Change (Grimely & Prochaska, 1995). This model, otherwise known as the Stages of Change model, posits that when an individual makes changes in his/her behaviour, he/she does so through a succession of stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. "The stages of change offer a temporal dimension that provides information regarding when a particular shift in attitudes, intentions, and behaviour may occur" (Grimely & Prochaska, 1995, p. 1). The conceptual framework for Aboriginal Young Offenders can be seen as a way of better understanding what it is that motivates these specific individuals to move from the pre-contemplation stage to contemplation (i.e. fear of negative consequences), and then into the preparation / action stage (realization).

Another example of a grand, over-arching theory of behaviour change is the Health Belief Model (Strecher and Rosenstock, 1974). This model "analyzes an individual's motivation to act as a function of the expectancy of goal attainment in the area of health behaviours" (Maiman and Becker, 1974, p. 348; cited in Hayes, 1991). The Health Beliefs Model includes many different variables that help to predict behaviour, including the perceived severity of consequences

of a threat and perceived efficacy of behaviours (internal locus of control). These variables present as a direct parallel to the conceptual framework presented here; the findings merely enhance our understanding of what those variable are for this specific population of people.

Both theories assume that “people are rational, aware, self-creating agents of their own health who can behave in the pursuit of self-interest ... and are variations of psychological models of motivation and behavioral change” (Chin, Monroe and Fiscella, 2000). Indeed, the conceptual framework presented here strongly suggests that with the proper motivation, Aboriginal Young Offenders will make pro-social changes in their behaviour. Although the above-mentioned theories have been used primarily in health research (i.e. smoking cessation studies), the assumptions they make are far-reaching and can pertain to all aspects of human behaviour and its modification.

5.2. Comparing the Conceptual Framework to Other Research on Making Positive Behavioural Changes

5.2.1. Maturation and the Realization “Time to Grow Up”

There exists a wealth of research focussing on the life course of young adults that indicates an “age of maturation” exists for these individuals; a time at which the individual reaches the necessary cognitive development that acts as a transition from a criminal life-line / career to a pro-social one (Hughes, 1997).

Examples of this research include a study by Sampson and Laub (1993; cited in Hughes, 1997), which revealed that “strong marital attachment and job stability were two transitions related to desistance from crime” (p.402). These transitions are positive assets for individuals and may make possible positive change in behaviour, even for individuals with a well-established criminal career. In another investigation, Shover and Thompson (1992) conclude that loss of interest, ability to understand consequences of criminal lifestyle, degree of pay-off, disenchantment with a criminal lifestyle and fear of consequences are explanations as to why deviance may naturally cease as the individual gets older (cited in Hughes, 1997).

More notably, Hughes, (1997), in a grounded theory study with young adult Black and Latino Males, “explored the life courses of its participants to discover factors that facilitated their positive developmental changes ... who are desisting from crime after, in many cases, long criminal histories” (Hughes, 1997; p. 403). Hughes’ study produced many findings with young males for ethnic minorities that were consistent with the findings for Aboriginal Young Offenders. Hughes concluded that maturation facilitated the respondents’ decision to make positive behavioural changes. Similarly, many respondents in this study stated that they came to a point when they realised that it was time to grow up, they were tired of the lifestyle and that they acknowledged the responsibilities they now had.

It reasonable to conclude that the process of natural maturation of the respondents played a role in creating the readiness of these individuals, which

lead to changes in their behaviour. In this state of readiness, the actual behaviour change is instigated by the prospect of very negative consequences if the behaviour did not change. More research would be needed in order to decide which (if either) has a greater effect on the individual, or if both are required in order for Aboriginal Young Offenders to adopt a more pro-social lifestyle. Maturation most likely accounts for the gradual adoption of a pro-social lifestyle that was discussed earlier.

5.2.2. Fatherhood and the Realization of Increased Responsibility

Other very strong parallels between the investigation completed by Hughes (1997) and this research project exist. Both investigations, involving participants of visible minorities, concluded that fatherhood (or the prospect of fatherhood) had a significant impact on behaviour of the respondents. Hughes (1997), states:

Concern and respect for children was one factor indicated by the data as facilitative. The respondents' accounts of childhood were unusually painful. One consequence of their painful experience may have been the development of a deep sensitivity towards other children they perceived to be at-risk of experiencing similar childhoods (p. 406).

The investigation with Aboriginal males reached the same conclusions. Respondent six illustrates this concept by stating "My stepson's dad is like my

real dad – a real deadbeat.” His assertion that he wants to be supportive of stepson and talk to him about issues that may arise with his biological father is evidence of his desire to parent in a responsible manner and his acknowledgement of the important role of the father.

In addition, the participant examples provided by Hughes mirrored those of this investigation, detailing accounts of abandonment by either father or mother and the feelings of anger and rage the respondents experience as a result. During the realization stage of the conceptual framework, the individuals used their personal experiences of poor parenting and their newfound responsibilities to provide the reason they needed to adopt more pro-social behaviour.

Discussion

In the finding section, the first objective (to describe the process and key concepts of developing and maintaining successful behaviours and lifestyle for an Aboriginal Young Offender) and the second objective, (to develop a theory that describes this process, which can be generalized to increase our understanding of what can effectively stimulate success in other Aboriginal Young Offenders) were met and articulated. According to the findings of this investigation, the process of successful reintegration can best be articulated as a

theory centred on the weighing of consequences. Behaviour modification for Aboriginal Male Young Offenders appears to depend upon the existence of meaningful relationship or legal consequences that will motivate the individual to change.

In the discussion section, other research on Young Offenders and effective methods of deterrence from criminal activity will be considered and compared. In addition, the third objective of the study (to make recommendations for policy and programming for Aboriginal Young Offenders, based on the findings that can effect a positive change in the type of programming available to this population of youth) will be discussed.

6. OBJECTIVE THREE: Recommendations for Programs and Policies

6.1. Meaningful Consequences

As mentioned in the literature review, the idea of providing meaningful consequences for Aboriginal youth, as a means of deterrence, is key to the Federal Government's Department of Justice proposed Youth Justice Act. The notion of what constitutes a meaningful consequence has been a widely debated issue in Canada for many years, with varying opinions as to what is truly motivating for any youthful offender. In a review of the news media, it is apparent that many media sources, in the reporting of youth crime, capitalize on the

sensational aspects of horrific incidences of youth crime and invariably call for more severe punishment of youthful offenders, increased jail time and advocate for adult sentences given to young offenders².

It is also commonplace to hear politicians call for the government to be “tough on crime”, which translates to a request for a more punitive criminal justice system for children. Stockwell Day, in a press release revealing the official opposition’s justice platform, stated, “If you do the crime, you must do the time. The law on sentencing must be changed to ensure there are serious consequences for those who commit serious crimes.” The press release goes on to state that the Canadian Alliance proposes to overhaul youth justice in Canada in the following ways: try 16 and 17 year old offenders in the adult court system; ensure adult trials and adult consequences for 14 and 15 year old offenders that commit serious violent crimes, or commit a crime using a firearm, or multiple serious offensives; and have courts carry over youth records to adult criminal records. (Canadian Alliance, 2000). These statements reveal the public paradigm that the longer the sentence, the greater the deterrent from violent or criminal behaviour.

² This is illustrated in the following articles:

Chabot, J. (1993) The death of a policeman. *Alberta Report / Newsmagazine*, Vol. 20 Issue 45, p26.

Mulawka, B. (1998) A stab at youth justice reform. *Alberta Report / Newsmagazine*, Vol. 25, Issue 24, p.6

Sheremata, D. (1997) Young Offenders Act up. *Alberta Report / Newsmagazine*, 09/01/97, Vol. 24 Issue 38, p24

Chisholm, P. and Thomas, D. (1996). Teenage Wasteland. *Maclean's*. Vol. 109 Issue 24, p58

Author Unknown (1996). Young Offenders. *Maclean's*. Vol. 109 Issue 22, p18

In an examination of the reality of Canadian criminal justice reveals “the rate at which adjudicated young offenders are sentenced to custody in Canada (33% in 1997), is the highest rate of youth incarceration in Western industrialized countries” (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, 1998; cited in Lescheid and Cunningham, 1999), even though “of 11 western industrialized countries ... in 1996 Canada’s victimization rates for violent offences, household burglaries theft, motor vehicle offences and bicycle theft, were close to the average for those countries (Juristat, 1997; cited in National Crime Prevention Centre, 1998). In other research, there is strong evidence to indicate that human service programs within a justice context are associated with strong reductions in the re-offending levels of young offenders and contribute more to reductions in antisocial behavior than sanctions (such as jail time) alone (Dowden and Andrews, 1999; Leschied and Cunningham, 1999). This evidence indicates, therefore, that imprisonment as a response to criminal behavior is both a costly and ineffective approach to protecting society.

Further, the demand that youth who commit adult crimes (such as homicide, sexual assault) receive adult time, further complicates the issue of effectiveness of imprisonment. “Their age and lack of experience make them vulnerable to the wide variety of very negative influences present in federal penitentiaries — institutions that house the most serious offenders in Canada” (Grant and Gal, 1999, p. 20). In addition, upon release from the federal system, those men who were incarcerated as youths are more likely to present much higher needs and require more resources to reintegrate into the community. They

are at a high risk to re-offend and have a lower re-integration potential than other offenders (Grant and Gal, 1999).

In summary, it appears that incarceration of Young Offenders does nothing to deter youth from committing crimes; increasing the amount of time in jail, therefore, would not be seen as a deterrent. While the data in this investigation indicates that adult time could be a deterrent for those who have not been to adult jail, research demonstrates that sending young adults to prison merely compounds the problem, causing even more barriers to successful reintegration. The public's primary goals of deterrence and punishment are not being met through incarceration, however the outcry for more incarceration continues to be heard.

In The National crime Prevention Centre publication, Picture of Crime in Canada, (1998), the following is cited,

Although there has been a slight change or even a reduction between 1988 and 1996 in the percentage of people who reported being a victim of crime, almost half of all Canadians reporting in 1993 thought that crime had increased (Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, (unknown), p.5).

This research suggests that it is the public's fear that drives the opinion that all crime, including youth crime, is on the rise and possibly out of control. The media propaganda (which follows the aforementioned history of political conservatism in Canada) about sensational youth crimes does much to fuel these opinions and leads to public outcry, including the call for more severe punishments for youth.

Speaking to the role of public fear in the creation of policy for offenders, in the publication, The Expanding Prison, Cayley (1998) states;

Excepting only in minor areas like parking, where penalties do seem to have some effect, the preventative effect of imprisonment is felt only by those who wouldn't have committed serious offences anyway. Reassuring those who obey the law is a real and serious function of imprisonment, but it is misleading to pretend that it constitutes crime prevention. (p. 91)

The findings of this research project echo and expand on this concept that jail is neither a meaningful consequence nor a deterrent for Aboriginal boys. In fact, the environment of Young Offender prison is such that for many of the respondents, it reinforced negative behaviours. All of the respondents (who went to jail) described the prison paradigm as "survival of the fittest". Most found it impossible to be a neutral person, who kept to himself and just did the time; extreme pressure exists to either exert control over others or be controlled. When the interviewer asked respondent number two why he bullied or "muscled" other inmates, he stated that he had the experience of others trying to intimidate him and was not going to let it happen again. He developed his reputation of being a "heavy" to protect himself – to get what he wanted and to avoid trouble. This respondent still maintains this attitude while living in the community; he uses his reputation at times to build associations with people he admires or avoid negative consequences.

Respondent number six elaborated on how he made the prison environment work for him, stating that he viewed jail as a closed environment and in Young Offender prison he experienced a great deal of personal power. He felt that younger or weaker inmates looked up to him and his friends because they didn't have a choice. In fact, respondent six described a situation whereby to survive in jail, boys need to build associations with negative peers for their protection or survival. He stated, "Either you are a leader or you get picked on". Because respondent six was able to feel powerful in this prison environment work, he perceived it as easy time and not a meaningful consequence.

Even though the sample of participants is limited and the researcher is hesitant to make generalizations that are too broad, the findings do indicate that the longer the respondents spent in jail, the less meaningful they found it as a consequence. For those who spent less than three months (respondents three and four) in a closed custody environment, jail was difficult for them due to their negative perception regarding loss of freedom; this alone created an unwillingness to return to jail. The respondents who spent a great deal of time in a closed custody environment (respondents two, five and six), found a way to survive and in their opinion, thrive in this environment. When speaking about the pressure that he felt in open custody to commit crimes while out on passes, respondent five stated, "Jail just screwed me up." He also stated that going in and out of jail was not a big deal to him as all of his friends were in jail. He also relayed different things that he did while in jail that he described as "very bad" and appeared to feel ashamed or remorseful.

6.1.1. Creating Prison Environments that Promote Positive Behaviour Changes

In this study all respondents spoke at length of how important their friends were to them (especially after the age of ten), as well as their reputation within their peer group. It is a logical supposition, then, that meaningful consequences for an Aboriginal child/adolescent caught in the crime cycle must involve his peer group. In order to create residential environments that will be truly rehabilitative for this population and motivate changes in behaviour, governments and communities need to consider either changing the individual's day-to-day peer group totally or changing the dynamics of the existing peer group. From an ecological perspective, if the peer environment is the one that has the most influence on the individual at the time (as compared to all other environments such as school and parents), service providers need to target that environment and attempt to influence changes that will lead to positive behaviour modification. Respondent three was adamant about this point, stating that his reason for participating in this study is because in his opinion, kids have to reach out to other kids and help them in a positive way.

Providing programs for personal development within the residential context may also be important. Programs such as substance abuse healing programs (promoting the realization that drugs and alcohol are destructive) or programs that develop a sense of responsibility or accountability for actions, correspond with the findings of this project, and may assist the individual in moving into the "realization" stage more quickly. These programs should only be

effective, according to the conceptual framework, if a meaningful consequence for not making changes exists as well.

Respondent six illustrates the potential need for effective programming; he stated that the programs he took in the adult system helped him tremendously. He stated that through programming he learned valuable concepts regarding power and control issues, stating, “Things that are not in your control – don’t waste energy worrying or thinking about them or hoping that they will change – it is just a waste of energy”. In the course of the discussion, respondent six did mention that he was ready for this program when he took it, and was not sure that the exact same program, offered in the young offender system would have been as effective. Again, the process of maturation may have a key role in the readiness of individual’s to move forward in their lives.

6.1.2. Alternatives to Incarceration

Research exists to prove that incarceration is not an effective deterrent from criminal activity and is generally not a meaningful consequence for Aboriginal Young Offenders caught in the crime cycle. Alternatives to imprisonment need to be considered in an effort to find an effective method of motivating behaviour changes in this population of offenders.

Aboriginal youth as a general population are considered to be “at-risk” due to a variety of social conditions outlined by Stevenson, et al, (1997) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (1996). The respondents in

this investigation further illustrated this notion in their description of many traumatic childhood incidences. Many respondents drew parallels between the onset of abusive relationships in their lives, abandonment, parental alcoholism / dysfunction and witnessing of horrific abusive incidents with other family members, and the distance they have felt from their families of origin.

Respondent three spoke of his internal pain that he felt was caused by an abusive relationship with his father, and how that led to his search for independence very early in his life. He indicated that he is still trying to resolve his relationship with his father and find forgiveness. Respondent three, speaking of his current situation and struggle with substance abuse, stated “I feel pain all day. I have so many battles that I am fighting within myself ... There is a lot of anger inside me still and I hold inside.”

Respondent four spoke about his mother and stepfather’s addiction, which led to he and his siblings being put in foster care. He stated that he was in six foster homes in one year and that he found it very difficult, stating, “That’s when all the trouble started.” In addition, respondents four and six experienced a profound sense of abandonment by their biological fathers – indicating that they still feel a great deal of anger towards their fathers. This anger has been an underlying motivator for their criminal or violent behaviours.

Although reluctant to speak negatively about his family, respondent five alluded to different experiences in his childhood that pushed him towards a lifestyle of dysfunctional behaviour and crime. Early on in his childhood, his uncles and aunts introduced him to intense incidents of substance abuse; he

described incidences of being taken to parties that lasted days, an aunt who was HIV positive and recently overdosed, and childhood experiences of witnessing abusive situations. He also stated that when he first became involved in criminal activities, he received a variety of beatings from police officers that resulted in his hate for authority and police. Upon release from jail, he went home to find his family in financial crisis, with no food in the house to feed the children.

Respondent five felt responsible for this situation, and decided to steal a car to give his mother money. He stated "There were a bunch of family problems when I got out of jail."

In summary, research shows that social issues most likely motivate an individual to adopt a criminal lifestyle as a young person. The findings of this investigation further indicate that Aboriginal Young Offenders most likely have experienced family dysfunction, a lack of parental guidance or support, or an abusive situation that led to a search for belonging or approval from their negative peer group early in childhood. These illustrations lead to the conclusion that there is a need for therapeutic interventions to deal with deep-rooted issues that underlie crime for Aboriginal Young Offenders, as a means of assisting in successful reintegration / crime prevention. In the study completed by Hughes, (1997), her grounded theory research uncovered very similar results:

The stories the respondents told of painful childhood experiences, feelings of abandonment, the aftermath of anger and their resolution not to continue this cycle indicate a number of areas for social work intervention. (p. 413)

She concluded that meaningful involvement in the lives of young offenders includes psychotherapeutic interventions to acknowledge and confront past issues.

Research in the United States has developed therapeutic interventions that are both cost-effective and effective in dealing with childhood issues thereby reducing the recidivism of young offenders. One such example is the Multisystemic Therapy (MST) Model, which was developed in the Medical University of South Carolina.

The underlying premise of MST is that criminal conduct is multi-causal; therefore effective interventions would recognize this fact and address the multiple sources of criminogenic influence. These sources are found not only in the youth (values, attitudes, social skills, organic factors), but in the youth's social ecology: the family, school peer group and neighbourhood. Research has shown that treating the youth in isolation of the other systems means that any gains are quickly eroded upon return to the family, school or neighbourhood. It is a key premise of MST that community-based treatment informed by an understanding of the youth's ecology will be more effective than costlier residential treatment. (Leschied, Cunningham & Dick, 1998)

A major part of the intervention of MST is working wherever possible with the parents of the young offender; the enhancement of the family's sense of

responsibility (the ability to resolve their own issues) and skill development are the ultimate goals.

The MST has also demonstrated excellent research results; one such example is in rural South Carolina, where violent and chronic youthful offenders participating in the MST program has 43% fewer arrests, committed 66% fewer self-reported offences and spent 64% fewer weeks in prison or treatment centres than youth randomly assigned to usual court sanctions and treatments (Henggeler, Melton and Smith, 1992, cited in Centre for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1998; cited in Mendel, 2000). MTS is currently being used in London, Ontario, and a four-year study on the effectiveness of the program is drawing to a close in the year 2001. Researchers expect “400 youth will receive the MST, and their progress and outcomes will be compared to 400 control youths who receive the services currently available in their home communities.” (Leschied, Cunningham and Dick, 1998, p. 1). To determine the effectiveness of MST for a specific cultural group, (Aboriginal Young Offenders) a program pilot and an attached scientific evaluation would be required; however, the potential for the program to yield similar results is great.

6.1.3. Building Protective Attributes in Aboriginal Young Offenders

This section will involve a discussion of how the resiliency research (developing protective factors in young people) can inform adult / community intervention into this process of reintegration for Aboriginal Young Offenders.

Specifically, these principles can be adopted in the development of environments for Young Offenders that will most likely result in successful reintegration and the adoption of a crime-free lifestyle.

Resiliency, in this instance, refers to a person's ability to survive hardship and thrive despite difficult conditions.

Resiliency Theory Overview

The resiliency model is a part of the philosophical revolution attempting to build upon negative-directioned risk reduction programs, and transform them to competency models (Richardson, Neiger, Jensen & Kumpfer;1990). It is linked to the psychological concepts of empowerment (Rappaport, 1987), psychological hardiness (Kobasa, Maddi, & Kahn 1982) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989).

The primary assumption of resiliency is that it credits people with the strength and potential to bounce back from hardship (Wolin & Wolin,1997). A corresponding key assumption, therefore, is that resiliency honours the individual's inherent power to help him / herself; it is "...a belief in every person's capacity for successful transformation and change, no matter what their life's circumstances" (Benard and Marshall, No date). This is a shift from the risk analysis paradigm – a shift toward concentrating on individual / environmental strengths, not deficits.

The assumptions of this model fit well for any program or intervention that is devised to promote a change of behaviour in Aboriginal Young Offenders. By acknowledging that regardless of historical, familial or environmental factors that the individual survived as a child, there remains hope and a strong belief that he

can make the changes necessary to become crime free and pro-social. This paradigm would shift away from goals of punishment and deterrence, which could be used to describe the current Young Offender system, to goals of empowerment and healing / rehabilitation. Through the resiliency paradigm “lens” incarceration would not be seen as a necessarily reasonable response to criminal activity in Young Offenders; the notions of resiliency support the findings of this investigation that indicate alternative sanctions would be more effective in helping young people make pro-social changes in their lives.

How Resiliency Theory Can Inform Young Offender Prison Environments

Benard (1991) identified five categories of traits that will help foster resiliency. They are: social competence (responsiveness, cultural flexibility, empathy, caring, communication skills, and a sense of humour); problem solving (planning, help-seeking, critical and creative thinking); autonomy (sense of identity, self-efficacy, self-awareness, task-mastery, and adaptive distancing from negative messages and conditions); religious or spiritual commitment (stable belief system and a sense of usefulness / belonging to a community) and a sense of purpose and belief in a bright future (goal direction, educational aspirations, optimism, faith, and spiritual connectedness). Garmezy (1983), adds to these characteristics by including an internal locus of control, low defensiveness / aggressiveness, high cooperation / participation, and emotional stability.

The resiliency model also indicates that the environmental factors have to support the development of these traits. Attitudes of the professionals are

important, as they need to believe that change is possible and likely; in the Young Offender prison system, therefore, the manner in which staff interacts with the inmates is critical. Staff need to believe that every young offender can and will change their behaviour; they also need to assume that these children are worthy of the programs and assistance that are required to make these changes. The atmosphere of the prison and all the programs need to be centred on the development of the protective factors in inmates. This would be a radical change in the manner in which children are incarcerated, as well as the skills that they would potentially have upon completion of their disposition. It is logical to assume that in a healthy, empowering environment, offenders will develop traits that will enhance their ability to reintegrate more positively.

Conclusion

Limitations of study

This study was limited by its small sample size; (the researcher experienced significant barriers throughout the research process in participant location and recruitment), as well as the fact that the respondents were only out of the prison system for one two four years. Ideally, a project such as this would involve a larger sample size (i.e. 100 or more participants) and involve a longitudinal component, whereby the participants are tracked and interviewed at different periods over a 10-year time frame, in order to collect more detailed rich

data. Projects of that magnitude, however, are very costly and time consuming - therefore rarely completed. The reliability of the investigation presented here, however, is enhanced by its correlation with findings of other studies, and the conceptual framework is comparable to larger, more over-arching theories. This investigation, therefore, adds to the knowledge base of specific information on the reintegration of Aboriginal Young Offenders. There has been no attempt to generalize the findings past this population; however, they are comparable to information available about other young offenders and, in particular, young offenders who belong to an ethnic minority.

In addition the process relies solely on the self-reported histories of the participants' lives, without providing triangulation of data from other sources (parents, other family, correctional service providers). The purpose of the project, however, was to develop a conceptual framework of successful reintegration, from the perspective of the successfully reintegrated Aboriginal Young Offenders. The emphasis was to help policy-makers, community members and service providers understand this perspective, in order to help them to create environments that are most likely to promote the offender's successful reintegration. To this end the author believes that the investigation was successful.

Finally, the author acknowledges two issues; first, she is not an Aboriginal Male who has spent time in the young offender system. Therefore, the results are clearly an interpretation of the data she collected from six respondents. Every effort was made, during the interview process to clarify any concepts that

may have been misunderstood between researcher and respondent; similar questions were asked in many different ways, at different times during the interviews to help the researcher better understand what the respondent was saying and meaning. Some of the researcher's life experience also helped to create some shared meaning between the respondent and the researcher, which assisted in the development of more accurate interpretations.

The role of "researcher" also may have created some power differential between the two, as this is an area of work that most respondents were not familiar with and had no point of reference for. A great deal of care was taken to explain why the research was being done, how it would be done and what would be done with the research results, to ensure that the individual was comfortable with the process.

Summary of Findings

The goals of this investigation included the development of a conceptual framework for the successful reintegration of Aboriginal Male Young Offenders. This framework can best be described as a variation of other behaviour-consequence models or theories. If a consequence is meaningful, it prompts the individual to experience a pivotal moment or turning point; the result is awareness that something must change. The researcher asserts on the basis of the data, that these realizations involve being "fed-up" with circumstances, a change in the way use of drugs and alcohol is viewed by the respondents, an acceptance of responsibility or accountability for specific things in life and / or a

desire to just grow up or feel like an adult. If the consequence of his action is not perceived to be negative, or is negative but manageable, this will reinforce behaviour and the individual will continue to behave as before.

The important consequences in an Aboriginal Young Offender's life appear to be the need to maintain important relationships and/or the potential for other significant consequences of behaviour. For most respondents other consequences that they experienced, such as Young Offender prison time, parental discipline or school expulsion, were not generally seen as meaningful.

The final goal of this study is to make recommendations for policy and programs for Aboriginal Young Offenders. It is recommended, therefore, that governments look seriously at the cost-effectiveness and saliency of incarceration for Aboriginal Offenders. This research indicates that there are three interventions that would be most likely to have a positive, sustainable effect on Aboriginal Young Offenders, thereby promoting successful reintegration. First, the implementation of programs that are designed to alter the dynamics of peer groups; second, providing intensive therapy for Aboriginal Young Offenders that includes the peer group, family and community; and third, changing prisons from institutions designed for punishment and deterrence, to residential environments that empower youth and build skills that are necessary for successful community living. More research needs to be done in this area, specifically around program development and corresponding evaluation in the aforementioned areas, to create culturally appropriate, effective interventions in the lives of Aboriginal Young Offenders.

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Appendix A:

Information Sheet for the Research Project: Factors Associated with the Successful Reintegration of Aboriginal Repeat Young Offenders

Contact Person

Patti LaBoucane - Benson

Phone: (780) 429-9324 (during business hours - 8:30 am to 4:30 pm)

Project Information

- Purpose:** To better understand how Aboriginal Young Offenders, who have been in trouble with the law many times, change their lifestyle to become law-abiding citizens, and stay out of trouble as an adult.
- Procedure:** Aboriginal boys or men will be interviewed and asked to tell their stories about getting out of trouble and staying out of trouble.
Information that is collected will be coded (all names will be replaced with numbers) to ensure that no one can be identified in the information. This information will be used to help the researcher understand why some Aboriginal Young Offenders succeed. By understanding this process, we can make changes that will help other youth succeed as well.
- Confidentiality:** All information collected will be kept strictly confidential - no participant will be identified as the owner of the information. Those participants who wish to be acknowledged for their contribution, will have their names printed in the final document in the PREFACE, in the section where the author will thank those that helped.
- Side Effects:** Although we are only asking participants to give information, they may find it difficult at times, because their stories are emotional or difficult to describe. If the participants feel that they need help as a result of the interview, the researcher will have the names and phone numbers with her of people (such as counsellors and support people) who may be able to give them that assistance.
- Participation:** Any individual has the right to decline participation (say "no") in this research at any time during or before the interview process. The interviews will be between 1 and 3 hours long. Participants will be paid \$20.00 per interview.
- Information:** The information collected in the interviews will be kept at Native Counselling Services of Alberta for 7 years. The interviews will be tape recorded, then put onto the computer. The tapes will not be kept - the transcriptions will be kept (on the computer and on paper) without any identifying names, to assist with confidentiality. The data will be available only for research purposes and only researchers can access the information. The information will be kept in the research department. Participants can have a copy of the final report by phoning Patti LaBoucane - Benson. A copy will be mailed to them, or they can pick it up at the office.

Appendix B:

Consent form: For Participation in an Interview

I have read the Information Sheet (above) and have discussed it with the researcher. All of the questions that I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.

I know that I may contact Patti LaBoucane at 429 9324 during business hours (8:30 am to 4:30 pm), if I have further questions either now or in the future.

I am participating in this study because I choose to. I know that I can choose not to participate.

I understand that I will be asked questions about my life and about getting out and staying out of trouble. I know that this may be difficult to talk about.

I have been assured that the researcher will ensure that the transcriptions (typing the recordings in to the computer) relating to this interview will be kept confidential. She will do this by ensuring that my name will be replaced with a number and that there will be no identifying names in the transcripts or final report.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without causing harm to myself.

(Name of Participant)

(Signature of Participant)

(Signature of Parent or Guardian if Participant is a Minor)

(Name of Witness)

(Signature of Witness)

(Date)

(Signature of Investigator or Designee)

Recognition Consent Form

I, _____ wish to have my name printed at the front of the final report of the research project entitled: "Factors Associated with Success of Aboriginal Young Offenders." I realize that the only place in the document, (or any other document that is printed with regard to this research project), that I will be identified as a participant of this project is in the section called "preface".

Signed;

—

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Name of Guardian or Parent (if participant is a minor)

Signature of Parent or Guardian (if participant is a minor)

Witness Name

Witness Signature

DATE: _____

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